

Save our services

Campaigning against local cuts



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Introduction

Years of cuts have completely changed the face of local services and the coronavirus pandemic has threatened to push local councils to the brink. In some cases, central government spending cuts have forced councils to delete thousands of jobs and close or make it harder to access services. Many have chosen to privatise services and reduce costs by cutting workers' pay and conditions. Thanks to the pandemic, councils have had to deliver a range of new services to help support their communities whilst at the same time their income has been badly hit. We are faced with a significant threat of job and service losses, over and above what has been experienced over the last decade.

But determined campaigning can help to prevent this. In the preceding years tireless campaigning by UNISON members and activists, working with their local communities, has helped to save some services from closure or privatisation. UNISON has a long history of campaigning against unfair policies that hurt local workers and communities, from fighting for the National Minimum Wage to resisting cuts. Given the scale of the financial challenge faced by local councils as a result of the pandemic and a decade of cuts, we must redouble our campaigning efforts both nationally and locally. Since 2013, UNISON's Save Our Local Services (SOS) campaign has put a spotlight on the scale of cuts to council services and their impact. This SOS campaign toolkit gives you, our activists and members across the UK, the tools you need to organise a campaign against national and local cuts. As the largest public services trade union, we are one of the last lines of defence to protect local services and speak out against the unnecessary cuts being imposed by the Westminster government. It is essential that we campaign together to Save Our Local Services!

UNISON is one of the UK's largest trade unions, serving more than 1.3 million members. We represent full-time and part-time employees who provide public services, although they may be employed in both the public and private sectors.

The local government service group is the largest group within UNISON, with over 600,000 members working in councils, schools, further education, food standards and fire and rescue services.



About local government cuts

Between 2010 and 2020, Tory-led governments cut £15bn from English councils, 40% of their funding. This led to job cuts, charges, closures and mergers or privatised services across the UK. Devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have also had their funding from Westminster slashed.

The coronavirus pandemic has served to compound these problems. Councils in England say they are facing a funding gap of £10bn for the financial year 2020/21, of which the Westminster government has only provided £5.3bn to date. In Scotland the funding gap is just over £1bn due to a lack of funding from Westminster and the choices made by the Scottish Government, whilst councils in Wales also continue to face a challenging situation due to the lack of resources from Westminster. In order to help their communities throughout the pandemic councils had to provide a range of extra services such as providing food parcels for the vulnerable, housing all homeless people and delivering PPE for social care providers in their area. At the same time they have seen their various income streams decline as a consequence of government decisions (such as a business rates holiday in England) and less demand for things like leisure services.

Cuts have made everyday life more difficult for groups who are more likely to rely on council services regularly, like women, older and disabled people. For them, cuts to just one service, like a local bus route, can mean that they miss out on using other services, become more isolated and then need more intensive support.

What does the future hold for local government?

The future for councils across the UK is very uncertain. In early 2020 councils across the UK knew little about the level of funding they would receive or the method that would be used to determine it. The pandemic has brought huge additional pressure upon them that could potentially lead to significant job and service cuts.

We know that before the pandemic some councils were already running a near-skeleton service for their communities and could only support the most serious, high-risk cases.

At the same time, extra demands on council budgets – like inflation and waste management – are on the increase. The number of people who might need support from vital social care services is rising fast, whilst recycling costs for councils have surged since lockdowns came into force across the UK.

All our local services are at risk of further cuts to fill the gaps. But community-focused services that councils do not have to provide by law are even more at risk of closure. Future Westminster cuts are forcing councils to make impossible choices – between libraries and leisure centres, social care and street lights, parks and potholes.

What can we do to save local services?

UNISON wants proper funding for councils from central government so that vital free or low-cost services for the whole community are secure for the duration of the pandemic and for the future. These services depend on a committed workforce, who deserve decent pay and working conditions, not pay freezes and job cuts.

As UNISON activists in local government, it is vital that we work to recruit new members, organise workers and campaign against cuts to local services. It is up to us to put pressure on the Governments throughout the UK to deliver more funding and to help councils find an alternative to cutting even more essential community services. We also need to work together where possible to help councils speak out about what services their communities need and how central government cuts are preventing them from providing them.

National cuts campaign

Large parts of this guide will help you to run local campaigns against cuts in your area, but we also want to encourage you to engage with our UK-wide campaign work. Delivering more funding for local councils from the national Governments across the UK will help to reduce the need for councils to make any cuts in their area.

Raise awareness about the importance of local council services

We have made this 60 second video, which has already been viewed over a million times, to illustrate the impossible choices that councils will face in terms of the services they will have to cut unless more government funding is forthcoming. Please share the video on your social media channels to make people aware of the vital services we risk losing. www.facebook.com/unisontheunion/videos/631192307831564

Make contact with your national politicians

We want to get our members to put pressure on governments across the UK to deliver more desperately needed funding for councils. We have set up this campaign action tool where people can write to their Member of Parliament and also to their Member of Scottish Parliament/Member of the Senedd/Member of the Legislative Assembly where applicable. Please encourage members in your area to make contact with their national politicians to tell them about how important the local services they deliver are and why they need more funding. We are also helping to facilitate virtual meetings between members and their national politicians so they can put across the case for more funding in more detail. If you are interested in this sort of meeting then please email SOS@unison.co.uk.



Recruiting and organising members – COVID proof

Although this toolkit concentrates on campaigning against cuts, it is important to remember that recruiting new members and organising members to stand up for their rights at work and get more involved in the union is a top priority. The more we build the union through our campaigning, the stronger those campaigns will be.

Campaigning against cuts is a great way to recruit and organise members. You can raise awareness about what UNISON does and it gives you a chance to talk to colleagues and others about the benefits of joining up.

“We did things a little differently... arranging an action / a meeting with the council leader and 400 members, where they gave testimony about the effect of the changes being proposed. We recruited 600 members” – Andy, East Midlands

Whilst you are planning and carrying out your campaign, think about the points below to make sure that you are also using every opportunity to get members organised, spot potential new activists and recruit new people to the union:

- **Talk to people about UNISON!** Find out what people are worried about at work and how the cuts are affecting their lives. Talk with them about how being a member of UNISON might help to solve these issues and how UNISON can help them take action to challenge cuts. Ask them to take a small action, eg sign a petition or come along to the next campaign meeting. Make sure you keep note of who you speak to and when, so that you can follow up with them later.
- **Make an extra effort to talk to a broad group of people.** A diverse membership equals a stronger union and shows employers that you speak for everyone. Make sure you talk to underrepresented groups of members, like low-paid, disabled, Black, LGBT and young workers.
- **Involve members in the campaign.** Get their views and ideas before deciding on the campaign focus. Encourage members to take on small campaign tasks. Not only will this mean less work

for you, members will feel like part of the campaign and may be encouraged to get involved in union activism more regularly.

- **Keep in regular contact with your branch.** Your branch is there to support you with all aspects of being a UNISON activist and they will have years of campaigning experience. They will be able to give you advice, support your work to recruit and organise members and may be able to help with resources.
- **Look out for workplace ‘leaders’.** Have you come across any members who seem to know most of their colleagues, are good at talking about and solving issues at work or want to get more involved in the union? These members would make great workplace reps! Start to build a relationship with them and talk about opportunities to get more involved in UNISON.
- **Make it easy to join up.** Always include recruitment material or information about joining UNISON in campaign communications to the public and colleagues at work.



Local campaign planning

A good campaign plan is the most important part of a successful campaign. It will help you to keep to schedule, make sure you target the right people and spot any potential problems before you start.

First steps

Identify the problem with members. Whilst UNISON's national campaigning priority is to put pressure on the different governments throughout the UK to provide more funding for council services there will also undoubtedly be a need to run campaigns in your local area to protect services. What type of service is under threat in your area? What is being cut – funding, jobs, opening hours – or is the whole service at risk of closure?

Contact your local branch. Let your branch know that you are planning a campaign – they will be able to give you ideas and advice on other people to involve in your campaign, campaign activities, using the media and so on.

Think about who else is affected. Which service users and community groups have an interest in tackling this issue? Are there less obvious allies you can draw in? Talk to them to get their views and make them part of your planning. Local anti-cuts campaigns are more successful when they can show a high number of residents are against proposals, so the more groups can support each other, the better! Find out more about organising with other groups in your community in the UNISON guide, *'Working with local communities to fight cuts and privatisation'*: <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/06/On-line-Catalogue199103.pdf>

Identify those with power and influence who you want to persuade. It is important that you aim your campaign activities at the right people for your efforts to lead to the change you want. Identify who will have the most influence over the decision on cuts. Do a bit of research on their responsibilities, political leanings, interests and groups that might influence them – this should help you to estimate how supportive they could be of your campaign. Potential targets could include:

- Colleagues at work
- Council leader and cabinet members
- Councillors

- Professionals that could be affected by cuts to your service, e.g. teachers, health professionals, social workers, emergency services etc
- Your local Member of Parliament (MP), Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP), Assembly Member (AM) or Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA)
- Local or national media
- Service users
- General public

Do your research! Find out when decisions about cuts to services will be made, who will make them and how. Are there possible alternatives to these cuts that you can include in your arguments?

Decide on your aim. A campaign aim outlines what you hope to achieve. It can be wide-ranging, like “stop funding cuts to local services”, or it can be more specific, like “stop the council from approving a proposal to cut our library's opening hours”. Make sure your aim is realistic, achievable and keep it as simple as possible!

Find fellow campaigners. This can be a good way to recruit new members to UNISON, get to know existing members and see who is interested in campaigning against cuts from an early stage.

SOS: have an open campaign-planning meeting to recruit volunteers to your team. This way you can raise awareness of the cuts proposed by the council and recruit new members at the same time.

Agree on objectives. Think about the changes that need to take place to reach your goal. How can your campaign team make them happen? Your objectives need to be specific, realistic and have a timetable so that you can check your campaign's progress.

SOS: With your campaign team, make a list of all the people you want to target. Decide on how much influence they have and how positive/negative they are likely to be towards your campaign, then place them in the chart below. This should help you choose who to spend the most effort on (start with those who are the most powerful and likely to support you)!

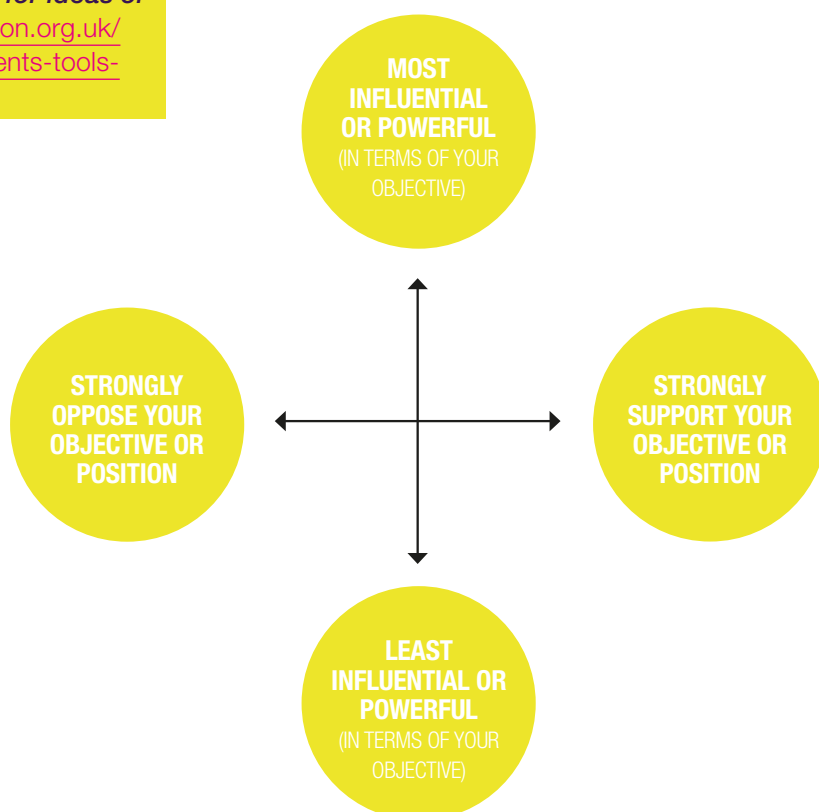
Plan your activities. Once you have agreed your campaign aim, objectives and your targets, think about what activities could help them to change their mind on cuts and support your campaign. How and when will you communicate with them – do you need to use local media?

SOS: A great place to get ideas for your campaign is UNISON's Organising Space, an online community for activists to share knowledge and build relationships. The space has lots of information on recruiting, organising members and campaigning, as well as forums where you can ask other activists for ideas or advice. Find out more at <https://www.unison.org.uk/get-involved/in-your-workplace/key-documents-tools-activists/organising-space/>

Do you have enough time and resources to achieve your objectives? It is essential that you have as much time as possible to build up your arguments and influence your targets. Be aware that sometimes campaigns can take months, even years, before they are successful. Think about how much time you have before the final decision is made on your service and how you will fund your campaign activities. If you are worried that you do not have enough resources, get in touch with your local branch and see if they will be able to support you.

Think about how you will evaluate your campaign. How will you know that it has been a success? How will you measure the impact of your campaign activities?

You can use our template campaign plan over to guide your planning. Check back on your plan during your campaign to check on your progress and make adjustments as circumstances change.



Campaign plan template

Campaign aim	
Objectives	
Campaign targets	
Activity	
Audiences	Who is the activity aimed at
Organisers	Who in your team will organise the activity
Recruit/organise	How can you use this activity to recruit and organise members
Resources needed	
Deadline	

Building the case against cuts

In any campaign, understanding the issues and having clear, simple arguments for your position is essential. A basic understanding of local government will give you the perfect starting point for your campaign.

Local government services: what you need to know

There are some services that councils must provide, like waste collection, libraries and social care, but they have a certain amount of freedom over how they are delivered. Many other services are discretionary, which means that councils can choose to provide them but do not have to. Councils can charge for discretionary services, like leisure centres or parking.

In England, local government varies by area. It can be made up of different types of councils that have responsibility for different services. Some areas have two tiers of council – county and district/borough – where the county council will provide most services, including adult social care and children's services. District or borough councils cover things like waste, housing and planning. Many cities have just one level of government – a unitary or metropolitan council, which provides all the services for an area. Some parts of England also have town and parish councils. They have very small budgets and sometimes manage town or village centres, litter, cemeteries, parks, allotments and so on.

Every London borough has a unitary council, but there are some services, like transport, police, fire and rescue and strategic planning, that the Greater London Authority (GLA), an overarching body, provides.

Fire and rescue services are governed by fire and rescue authorities. Police authorities supervise police forces in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In England and Wales, local police forces are managed by a directly-elected Police and Crime Commissioner.

All councils in Scotland and Wales are unitary councils. Northern Ireland councils do not have the same responsibilities as the rest of the UK. Separate organisations control health services, social care, education and libraries. If you are campaigning in Northern Ireland, make sure you contact your branch to determine which body provides the service you are campaigning for.

Combined authorities

Some councils have recently joined up with neighbouring areas to create a 'combined authority'. Combined authorities work alongside local councils, but they can have powers over services agreed by the member authorities, like transport, infrastructure, or health and social care. This only applies in England and Wales.

You can find out more about combined authorities in this parliamentary briefing: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06649/SN06649.pdf>

How do councils make decisions?

Councils can be structured in a number of different ways:

- **Leader and Cabinet**
A council leader, elected by councillors, selects a group of councillors to form a cabinet. Each cabinet member has responsibility for a particular sector.
- **Council and Committees**
A council leader is supported by committees, who are responsible for different sectors instead of individual councillors.
- **Directly elected mayor**
A mayor, directly elected by the public, chooses a cabinet of councillors. Each cabinet member is responsible for a particular sector.

Councillors have a responsibility to work with local organisations to engage with residents and service users and represent their ward at the council. How decisions are made will depend on the structure of your council – some will be made by a cabinet member or a committee, the cabinet as a whole, or for larger decisions, the full council may have to vote. Have a look at your council's constitution or scheme of administration – this should be available on the council website. It will explain how the council is organised and who makes decisions about particular service areas.

Local government finance: the basics

Local government finance is complex. Here is some basic information below to get you started on thinking about the financial situation that councils face.

Council spending is either 'revenue' spending on day to day costs, such as staffing or 'capital' spending on assets that have a long life, like a new building.

Revenue Spending

Councils get most of their income for revenue spending from three main sources:

- **Council tax**
In Northern Ireland residents still pay 'domestic rates' which were replaced by the poll tax and then the council tax in England, Wales and Scotland
- **Business rates**
A tax on commercial properties
- **Central government funding**
In England and Wales the main government grant is called Revenue Support Grant. In Scotland it is known as General Resource Grant and General Grant in Northern Ireland.

There may also be specific grants that can only be spent on specific services, for example the Public Health Grant (in England) or Dedicated Schools Grant (in England).

Other income comes from various sources including interest on money invested, trading and fees and charges.

Capital spending

Councils finance their capital spending by:

- Government grants
- Selling assets
- Borrowing
- Revenue contributions

You can spend revenue income on capital projects but you can't spend capital on revenue projects – so councils can't borrow money to finance day to day spending.

Councils that still own their own housing stock must keep a separate ring fenced account, known as the housing revenue account (hra) and the income from council rents is paid into that account.

Government grants

In England, the government has drastically cut revenue support grant. It was just over £15bn in 2013/14 but by 2019/20 it fell to just £2.3bn.

Funding has also been cut in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Council tax

Councils collect council tax on domestic properties (domestic rates in Northern Ireland) and use this money to help pay for local services.

Council tax has been frozen in Scotland since 2007 but after a nine-year freeze there are now proposals to allow councils to raise council tax levels by 3% each year.

In Wales, Council Tax has been rising by around 4% each year but most of this has been included in the funding settlement assumptions made by the Welsh government.

In England, councils have to hold a referendum if they want to increase council tax by more than a percentage set by government ministers. Until recently, the Government gave councils 'incentives' to freeze council tax, but that policy has been abandoned.

District councils can increase council tax by up to 2%, and councils with responsibility for social care (counties, unitaries, metropolitan boroughs and London borough councils) can raise council tax by up to 4% (2% must be spent on social care) without holding a referendum. Local referenda are costly and time consuming, with no guarantee of success, so they act as a barrier to larger council tax increases to pay for local services.

The proportion of a council's budget that depends on council tax income varies enormously by area.

Business rates

Business rates (sometimes called non-domestic rates) are a tax on commercial properties.

In England, councils collect business rates.

Some councils are business rates rich, while others are business rates poor – so councils pay a ‘tariff’ or get a ‘top up’ from central government that partly evens things out.

Until 2013/14 councils paid all the income from business rates into a central pool and central government paid it all out to local councils through something called ‘formula grant’ – revenue support grant plus business rates.

But as government funding was cut the government could see that, soon, the money raised from business rates would be more than it was paying out to local councils.

Since 2013/14, councils forecast how much they will collect each year and pay 50% of the forecast to central government. The other 50% is kept locally and shared between the different tiers. So, for example, in the shire areas 40% goes to the county council and 10% goes to the district. Local councils keep 50% of any rates they collect above the forecast.

By 2015/16 the central share of business rates paid by councils to the government was £1.887bn more than the government paid out to councils in revenue support grant. As the government cuts revenue support grant that ‘surplus’ gets bigger and reached more than £10bn/year by 2019/20.

In Northern Ireland, business rates have two components: a district element that goes to the local council and a regional element that goes to the Northern Ireland Executive.

In Wales and Scotland, councils pay the rates they collect into a central pool which is distributed back to councils as part of the local government settlement.

Reserves

Councils face turbulent times and need reserves to deal with emergencies that they cannot fund with their usual income, such as sudden growth in the number of children looked after or natural disasters such as floods.

All Councils will have unallocated reserves and earmarked reserves that are sums set aside for specific purposes such as equal pay back pay liabilities. Each year, as part of the budget setting process, the Chief Finance Officer has to issue a statement on the ‘adequacy’ of the reserves.

Councils face the ‘double whammy’ of cuts to their funding from central government and budget pressures. Councils may use their reserves to support services while they are being restructured but they can only be used once.

Your council's budget

By law, councils must set a balanced budget. Some councils must do so before 1 March and the rest must do so by 11 March each year.

Councils should also publish a medium term financial plan, which usually outlines the budget cuts they expect to make over the next three, five or even ten years. These documents can be very complicated, with detailed financial language and jargon. But the summaries can give you an idea of the cuts and budget pressures faced by your council and their plans for the future, which could be useful when lobbying MPs against cuts to local government funding.

SOS:

- ***How has your council decided to manage the cuts it faces? Some councils prefer to cut more services and jobs but keep council tax frozen each year. UNISON wants councils in England to raise council tax by the maximum amount available (2% for district councils and 4% for unitary, county, metropolitan and London borough councils) to increase their income as much as possible whilst avoiding a referendum. We want councils in Scotland to be able to raise council tax too, where local people agree.***
- ***Local councils are not the enemy. National politicians, primarily those in Westminster, have chosen to stop funding public services over the***

last decade. They have then failed to provide councils with the additional support they have required to help them deal with the pandemic. These decisions could force councils into making terrible cuts. It is important to show the council that you understand the situation it is in and that you want to work together to find a way to save services.

- *Show the impact of cuts on your community – encourage campaign supporters to tell their stories about the impact of cuts. Helping councillors to understand how many people would be severely disadvantaged by proposed cuts could influence their final decisions on funding.*

Showing the impact of cuts

There are national and local resources that you can use to find statistics or research on the rate and impact of cuts to local services:

- **UNISON’s council cuts website:** UNISON’s SOS campaign has information about the local government funding crisis at [unison.org.uk/sos](https://www.unison.org.uk/sos)
- **Your council:** Some councils have a page on their website that summarises statistical information about local residents.
- **Other campaigns/organisations:** local or national campaigns and other groups, like charities that work with the type of service you are campaigning for or its service users, may have relevant research and statistics that you can use.
- **Freedom of Information:** By law, you have the right to ask your council for information. You can use it to find out how much money they have cut from a service and why they have made certain decisions. Some information is exempt from this law, eg if it will affect a current legal case. The council can also refuse your request if it will take too much staff time or resources to answer, the request is vexatious or repeats a previous request. For more details on Freedom of Information (FOI), read this UNISON guide: <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/06/On-line-Catalogue150073.pdf>

- **Office for National Statistics:** <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>. Click on ‘Local Authority Profile’ to search detailed information on your local area, including population information, employment rates and more. You can compare with other council, regional and national areas.

If you have the resources, you might want to consider doing your own research, such as a survey of staff or service users. This could be a useful way to promote the campaign and to find case studies – more detailed examples of how people benefit from the service and how they would feel if the service were cut.

Talking to people to collect case studies is another good opportunity to recruit people to UNISON. You can make short videos on your mobile phones too, which would work really well on social media.

“Get the message out to the service users so that [they] can contact councillors about the loss of service” – Colin, East Midlands

Develop your campaign messages

It is vital to have a few clear ‘messages’ or arguments that you can use to explain your local campaign and drum up support. These will form the basis of your media work, political lobbying and general campaigning, so it is really important that your messages are simple and persuasive. When developing your campaign messages, consider:

- Are they easy to understand? Try explaining each message to a friend or relative in one sentence
- Do they reflect the main issues you identified in your initial planning?
- Do they include a possible solution to the cuts you are campaigning against?
- Can you fit in a slogan from an existing UNISON campaign (eg Save Our Local Services)?

Once you have your messages agreed, make sure that everyone in your campaign team uses them whenever they talk about the cuts or the campaign, especially in the media.

Equalities

It is important to consider the impact of cuts on equalities groups in your community when campaigning.

They are often the most likely to use services that are particularly vulnerable to cuts. In England, Scotland and Wales there are nine communities or 'protected characteristics' that the law protects:

- Gender
- Disability
- Race
- Gender reassignment
- Religion and belief
- Age
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Sexual orientation

SOS: at UNISON, we include low-paid workers as a group that are particularly disadvantaged and should be protected. Some groups, particularly women, disabled and black workers are more likely to be low-paid. Many local government workers are low paid. Think about how to show the impact of service cuts on the low-paid in your community. Remember that low-paid workers are more likely to use local services and spend money locally, so would be disproportionately affected by local cuts.

Councils have a legal responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to consider how to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between groups

In England, councils must consider the impact of their policy decisions on protected characteristics. When implementing a reduction in a service, it is good practice for councils to carry out an equality impact assessment to demonstrate that they have met the PSED's requirements. Ask your council how they have considered the impact of planned cuts on equalities groups and for a copy of their impact assessment if they have one.

Councils in Scotland and Wales must carry out a full assessment of how policy decisions will affect protected characteristics and publish their findings.

If you believe that your council has not identified equalities groups who you know would be unfairly affected by cuts, use this to challenge councillors about their decisions. If you are campaigning in Scotland or Wales, find out how you can give evidence or take part in equality impact assessments.

Team up with local community or voluntary organisations who work with these communities. They will have powerful examples of how important these services are for particular service users, which your campaign can use to highlight the potential impact of cuts.

Talk to your branch's equalities or Self-Organised Group officers about your campaign – they may be able to help you to organise amongst equalities groups and advise you on supporting workers who have been unfairly affected by cuts. Find out more about UNISON's work to fight for fairness and equality at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/>



Different ways to campaign

There are many activities you can ask other activists, members and the wider community to take part in as part of your campaign. As always, it is important to think about your campaign plan when deciding what to do – how will this influence your campaign targets? Do you have the time and resources to complete the activity? We have listed some ideas for campaign activities below.

Local campaigning

- Petitions
- Leaflets, posters
- Public meetings
- Demonstrations, rallies
- Stalls at local events
- Fundraising events
- Public stunts
- Exhibitions

Media and Online

- Letters to local press
- Call-ins to radio shows
- Local press releases
- Social media
- Surveys
- Online petitions
- Emails
- Short videos of service users or workers facing cuts

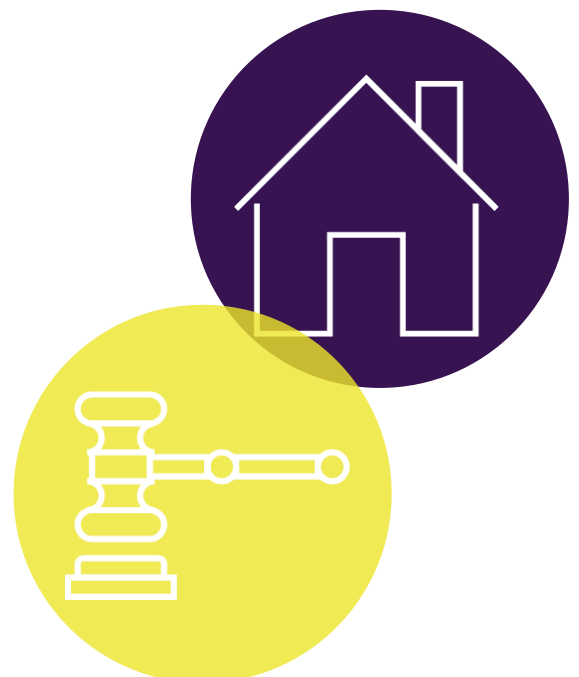
Lobbying

- Publish local research
- Attend public council meetings
- Respond to public consultations
- Write to and meet with councillors
- Write to your MP (and your MSP, AM, or MLA in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland)
- Attend MP surgeries

How can you make your local campaigning activities inclusive, positive and eye-catching in a way that will appeal to the public?

If you think you might need extra resources for larger activities, ask your branch about applying to UNISON's General Political Fund. It supports political campaigning at all levels of the union and any branch with members who pay into the fund can apply.

***“Try and campaign in a variety of ways - paper letters, online petitions, speaking to people, press releases”
– Mark, Cymru/Wales***



Lobbying politicians

In order to deliver more funding for local councils we need to put enough pressure on the Governments across the UK through our national politicians. The Westminster Government is our primary target for our national campaigning work as they not only can provide funding for councils in England but can also dictate how much funding the governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland receive. Members in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will also then want to engage with their local members of their national governments too in order to ensure that they allocate enough funding to local councils.

"It was pre election time so the borough council was sensitive to bad publicity... we received significant councillor support"
Colin, East Midlands

Lobbying national government politicians

Your local member of parliament (MP), and if you are in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, your MSP, AM or MLA, can be very helpful in campaigns against cuts. We want them to support our national campaign goal of closing the funding gaps that councils are facing. They can also support your campaign locally as well as highlighting the impact of cuts in your area to central government or at their nation's parliament or assembly.

In some constituencies, the sum total of UNISON members can be more than an MP's election majority. This gives UNISON real campaigning power which you should exploit! Even MP's of governing parties can be willing to join campaigns against unpopular cuts if they feel that their position is threatened. UNISON can help you identify whether your constituency is one of these.

You can find out more about your local MP, MSP or MLA by visiting www.theyworkforyou.com. In Wales, you can find your AM by visiting the Welsh Assembly website:

<http://www.assembly.wales/en/memhome/Pages/memhome.aspx>

If your branch doesn't have links with them already, the best way to start a relationship with your MP is to write to them.

Our campaign action tool allows members to write directly to your MP and also your MSP, Member of the Senedd or MLA if applicable to call for more council funding: <https://action.unison.org.uk/page/65995/action/1>

Our campaign action tool already has a template letter in place for you to use but you are also free to create your own letter. Make sure that in your letter you:

1. Confirm that you live in their constituency by providing your address – national politicians only represent their own constituents
2. Include information on your campaign, why you are fighting against cuts in your area and why more national funding is required to fund local councils.
3. Explain clearly what you want your national politician(s) to do – this could include:
 - Asking the Chancellor and/or Finance Minister for more funding for local councils
 - Meet you and service users to discuss your campaign
 - Attend or speak at an upcoming event
 - Write to your local authority in support of your campaign
 - Ask the relevant government Minister for further information on funding cuts
 - Raise questions on the cuts at parliament
 - Support your campaign in the local media and online
4. Ask for a reply

If you are planning to meet your national politician then ask to meet with them virtually if possible as many are not holding traditional constituency surgeries at the moment. If you need help or advice arranging such a meeting then email sos@unison.co.uk for assistance. After the meeting, follow up with a letter or email to thank them, outline what you think the outcomes of the meeting were and what they agreed to do.

Lobbying local politicians

It will be vital for your campaign to get your message across to influential decision-makers at your local council. Your branch may already have established relationships with local councillors or committees who could support your campaign.

SOS: Talk to your branch about the political makeup of your council and how you might have to tailor your campaigning tactics to deal with this – is there one party that runs the council or is it a coalition of two or more parties? Could the ruling party or parties be sympathetic to the campaign, or would you be better off targeting the opposition?

Activities that can help with influencing your local council include:

Meetings with councillors

Councillors are good at raising issues and asking questions of key decision-makers, particularly if they are in opposition. If you organise a meeting with a local councillor, decide what you are going to ask them to do for the campaign before you meet. This could include:

- Asking the relevant cabinet member or committee specific questions about proposed cuts to your service
- Raising questions at council meetings
- Attending one of your campaign events
- Supporting your campaign in local media

Make sure you follow up regularly with councillors after the meeting to keep them updated on the campaign and remind them of actions they agreed to take.

Make sure you also point out to any councillors you engage with that UNISON are working hard to secure additional funding for council services which would hopefully relieve the pressure that they are under and that we share the same objectives.

A 'mass lobby'

This is when you arrange with your council for many campaign supporters to hold meetings with their councillors at the same time, so that you can arrive at the council as a big group. This can be a great way to promote your campaign in local media, demonstrate how many residents are against the cuts and how a particular service benefits the whole community.



Asking questions in public meetings

Look at your council's website to see which public meetings might be relevant to you. You should also find out how to ask questions at public meetings as you may have to submit them to the council beforehand.

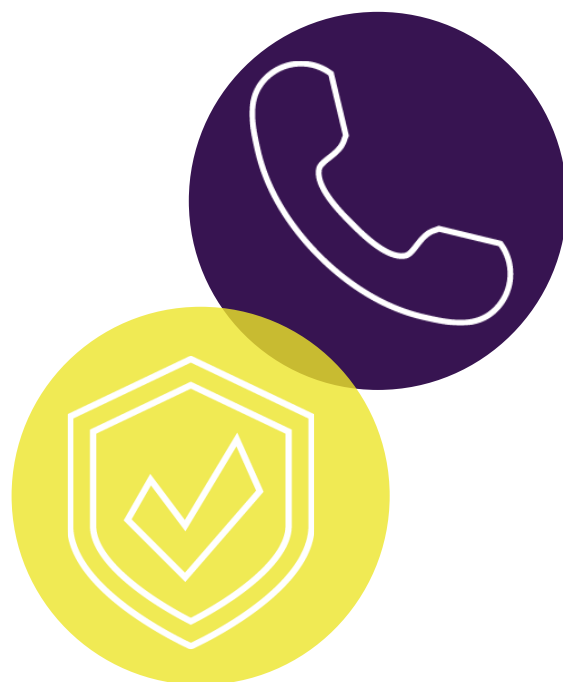
Asking campaign supporters to respond to public consultations

If your council is running a consultation on proposed cuts, encourage supporters to respond. Ask supporters to include your campaign messages in their response and personal stories of why the service is important to them.

“Online petitions are brilliant and really easy to set up - it gets the message right to those who need to hear what’s happening” – Mark, Cymru/Wales

Submitting a petition. Petitions can be a useful way to show the council how many people want the service to stay open. If you do a petition online, be sure that you will get a lot of signatures – if you cannot find many people to sign your petition online it might look like you have few supporters! Think about how you will submit the petition – can you submit it as part of a protest, event or photo opportunity that you can invite local media to?

Lobbying your scrutiny committee (England and Wales only). A scrutiny committee reviews council decisions. They can recommend that a decision is changed or reconsidered, but they can't force the council to do this. You can go to meetings and ask questions, submit a request for scrutiny of your service and offer to give evidence, or you can ask councillors to lobby the committee for you.



Communicating your campaign

How you communicate with others about your campaign will be an important factor in your success.

Local media is a great way to get the news out about your campaign and can help to put pressure on decision-makers. Before you get started, remind yourself of:

- Your audience (this can include your campaign targets and the general public)
- Your campaign messages

Timing is everything when it comes to successful media work. If there is an important date or activity that you want to publicise, give yourself plenty of time to go through all the parts of our media checklist below:

1. Talk to your branch

Double check that your plans for local media work are passed on to your UNISON Regional office or UNISON Centre, so that you can avoid any clashes and get extra support if you need it.

2. Build up media contacts

Your branch may already have a list of contacts that you can use. If not, create a list of all local newspaper, radio and TV sources. Find out who the best journalists are to contact and tell them about your campaign – what your aim is and any public meetings, events or local research that you have planned. Make sure that one or two people from your campaign team acts as contact person for journalists to build up a good relationship.

3. Find out about deadlines

Ask your media contacts when is the best time to send them press releases, reports or information about upcoming events.

4. Write/call in to newspapers/radio

Keep letters short and try to refer to something that was in the last issue of the paper. For a local radio show, try to have a number of people ready to phone in with different points on the issue.

5. Plan your news story

Think about which of your campaign activities might interest journalists. If you have an event planned, will your local MP be attending or will you do something that stands out visually? New hard-hitting facts and human stories about the impact of cuts locally also work really well.

6. Send out a news release

Make sure that you follow up with journalists by phone once it goes out. Look at UNISON's media centre (<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/media-centre/>) or ask your branch for examples of previous press releases. In your press release, you should include:

- The news story – what is happening and who is involved, when and where it is happening (if it is an event) and why the campaign exists
- Quotes from a campaign spokesperson and any local statistics or stories from individuals that support the news story. Make sure that you have written consent from people if you use their stories and find out if they are also happy to do interviews.
- A contact name and telephone number of a campaign team media contact, who is happy to handle calls about the campaign after the press release goes out and do interviews for press, TV and radio.

If you do not get much interest from your news release, try turning the main details from it into a letter to send to local papers. If you are holding an event, take good quality photos that you can send out afterwards. If journalists call to ask for a quote, do not feel like you have to give them something on the spot. You can ask for their details, take five minutes to think of your quote (using your campaign messages) and call them back.

7. Get ready for any interviews

If a journalist contacts you for an interview, find out as many details as possible: When and where will it be? What questions will they ask you? (If on radio/TV) Will it be live? Will the interview be with you alone or with other people?

Before the interview:

- Prepare one or two points you want to make (your campaign messages should help you here).
- Think about arguments that others could make to support cuts and how you can argue against them. Do not let an opponent confuse you or pull you off track – make sure you get your points across. If you have time, try to practice with a member of your team.
- If your interview is on TV, try to stand in front of something that promotes your campaign, or wear a campaign badge or T-shirt.

SOS: Remember that communications does not just mean media work! Think about how to communicate with colleagues at work or with the public. You can use email, newsletters, posters at work, stalls at events, public meetings etc to organise members and build support in your community.

Using social media

Social media, like Facebook, Twitter and blogging, can be a cheap and fast way to spread the word about your campaign.

Facebook is a popular networking site that many organisations use to build an online community. They use Facebook pages to keep followers updated on their activities, share information and answer comments.

Twitter is a faster-paced, shorter version of Facebook, where posts are limited to 140 characters (about 20 words). It is used by many politicians, organisations and campaigners to share information and interact with the public and each other.

If you create a Facebook and/or Twitter profile for your campaign, remember to:

- Follow like-minded campaigns (including UNISON!), politicians, local media and any of your targets who have Facebook pages or Twitter profiles
- Post regular updates and any interesting information about your campaign or what is happening in your area
- Try to start conversations with your followers about cuts – make sure you respond to any comments or tweets as soon as possible
- Retweet tweets or share Facebook posts – you can also add a comment if you have space. This will notify the original sender that you have sent their message on to your followers. This can be a good way to draw attention to your profile
- Ask your followers to retweet or share messages when you are asking for help or for people to take action eg sign a petition or attend a public meeting
- You can include people in your Twitter or Facebook posts by adding '@' followed by their profile name (eg @unisondamage). This is a good way to reply to people or ask them questions directly

- Add the hashtag symbol (#) to key words in your tweets and Facebook messages so that they appear in topic searches (eg #cuts, #SOSlocalservices) – this can be a useful way to pick up new followers

If you do not feel confident in using social media, you can try it out by creating a personal profile first and experiment with posting, retweeting or sharing and so on, before you create accounts for your campaign.

SOS: If you are using social media to campaign against cuts planned by your employer, be aware of whether there is a work policy about private use of social media and what it says. Steer clear of messages that could be offensive, particularly aimed at your employer – as a general rule, if you would not say it to their face, do not post or tweet it!

BUT, using social media to campaign is not always as easy as it sounds! Building up a community of followers and keeping social media accounts updated with interesting news about your campaign can become a big job.

Before setting up your own blog or social media profile for the campaign, think about who you are trying to communicate with – are they likely to follow blogs or use forums like Facebook or Twitter? If your branch and regional office already have a website, blog or social media accounts then talk to them about using their profile online to promote your campaign.

The SOS campaign also has a Facebook page at facebook.com/unisonLGcampaigns and Twitter account twitter.com/UNISONdamage – you can ask us to promote your campaign nationally if needed.

Closing your campaign

How you end your campaign is almost as important as how you start it.

Make sure that you publicise your successes in local media. Let us know via your branch or regional office about your campaign's impact: we would love to share your stories of successful campaigns nationally, to inspire others to fight the impact of Tory government cuts in their area. And it's vital that we learn the lessons from your campaigns and share them across the union. The end of your campaign is also a good chance to thank everyone who got involved in making it a success. If you had any volunteers for your campaign who were not already UNISON members or activists, talk to them about becoming a member, workplace contact or steward.

Evaluating your campaign – thinking about what worked and what did not – is often missed in the very busy time at the end of a campaign, but it is so important to do. Every time you evaluate a campaign it helps to make sure the next one is better, because you can repeat things that worked well and avoid making the same mistakes.

How to evaluate your campaign

As always, your campaign plan will come in handy here. Think about what you aimed to do at the beginning of the campaign and then answer the following questions:

1. Did we achieve our goal?
2. What campaign activities had the biggest impact? Why?
3. What worked well when we recruited and/or organised members during the campaign?
4. What should we do again in our next campaign against cuts?
5. What should we do differently next time?

Keep your evaluation simple and make sure that you allocate time for your whole campaign team to discuss this together and share their thoughts on the campaign.

We hope that this toolkit has inspired you to join us in our campaign to stop the Government from punishing local government any further.



- Plan, plan, plan! Make sure that you have a clear aim, target the right people and have enough time and people working on the campaign to meet your objectives
- Talk to members and local people about the things that are hurting them most. Build your campaign around them
- Recruit and organise members – the more voices we have, the stronger we will be
- Get your campaign messages right – keep them short and simple and highlight the impact of cuts
- Show the impact of cuts on the whole community, especially vulnerable groups whose voices are often missed
- Communicate as much as possible – with your branch, colleagues, your campaign targets and community
- Publicise your successes and learn from what goes wrong – sharing your victories will inspire others to join the fight against cuts!

Good luck!

